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JUDSON'S PRISON EXPERIENCE

By RALPH WELLES KEELER

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"Halt!"

The command was given by a harsh and surly voice.

Mrs. Adoniram Judson, who was taking the dinner from the stove, turned and looked out of her kitchen window. As she did so, she called her husband, who immediately laid aside the Burmese Bible on which he was working and came running to her.

Outside, drawn up in single file and facing their own little home, was a guard of twelve burly Burmese soldiers. During the few weeks previous Mr. and Mrs. Judson, missionaries of the gospel of Christ in Burma, had become familiar with the sight of soldiers, for it was the season of accession to the throne, and Ava, the golden city of Burma, was in gala attire. They had seen the king and queen make a formal entrance to the city and take possession of the palace with the golden dome. They had seen the white elephant, decked with gold and jewels, go by in state. The soldiery and the slaves also had all

become familiar to their eyes. But the soldiers had never before visited their home.

Now that war had been declared between England and Burma they felt a little anxious, for while they were Americans, the Burmans hardly recognized the distinction. And the captain of the guard before the house was the spotted man from the prison — Ava's executioner. What did it mean!

"Where is the teacher?" asked the man with the spotted face.

"I am he," said Mr. Judson, who had approached the door after his wife opened it. "What is it?"

"You are called by the king," replied the officer of the prison.

As he said these words he fell upon Mr. Judson, pinned him to the ground, and began to torture him with a small cord; winding it about his breast so that his arms were bound fast, he twisted the cord so as almost to wrench his prisoner's shoulders out of joint. When he was fastened securely they turned to Mrs. Judson.

"Don't take her, I beg of you," the prisoner cried out.

The porch of the little half-finished house was rapidly filling with natives who wondered what was going on. The masons threw down their tools and fled; the little Burman children

screamed and cried; and the Bengali servants stood dumbfounded. Afraid of the crowd, rather than moved by the white man's plea, the executioner drew still tighter the cords which bound Mr. Judson, and dragged him off to the court.

Moung Ing, Mr. Judson's servant, followed the crowd to the court. Here in the robes of state sat the governor of Ava and the officers of the city. And as Moung Ing listened he heard the king's order read and saw his master cast into the death prison.

Unsheltered by trees, this miserable prison stood sweltering in the tropical sun. It was scarcely forty feet from end to end and thirty feet across. The walls were only five feet high at the side, while the roof rose to about ten feet in the center. There were no windows to let in the sunshine. There was no ventilation, except through the cracks in the board wall and through the door. But the door was seldom opened except to put a prisoner in or take one out.

"Come, move along!" Angrily the guard shoved the prisoner into the dark.

The sudden change from the bright sunlight to the dim murky prison blinded Mr. Judson. For the only light was an earthen pot of burning oil swinging from a crooked tripod in the center of the room.

Hurrying him down to the end of the room, the executioner again threw Mr. Judson to the ground, and this time locked three sets of iron fetters to his legs and tied him to a long bamboo pole. In this position he lay throughout the long afternoon.

After he had become used to the dim light he was able to look about him. But what a sight! In that wretched little room were crowded ninety-seven prisoners. Poor, emaciated women and half-naked men, all huddled together, lived in this filthy prison week after week. The room was never washed, and the stench which arose from the floor and walls was terrible. Vermin ran riot over prison and prisoners. And the prisoners fastened in long rows of stocks around the room had little chance to defend themselves from the savage attacks of these pests. Nor were those whose feet were thrust through heavy timber logs in which holes were bored any better off. For the wooden pins which held their ankles fast hurt them so that they had little time to attend to much else but pain. One woman groaned, a man cursed, and an incessant babel filled the air. Government officials in disgrace, thieves, murderers, and evil-doers of all kinds were crowded in with the English and American suspects.

Judson turned to his fellow-prisoner on the left.

"What is the matter?" he whispered softly.

Before his neighbor could answer the little bamboo door at the end of the prison opened and the evil-looking Burman with the spotted face — the keeper of the prison — stole in among the terrified men and women, and going straight to a poor wretch huddled close to a machine of torture seized him and bore him away.

The spotted man had an unusually ferocious expression on his face, and a cruel short-sword was stuck in his belt. As he hurried his shrieking victim through the heaps of prisoners and out the door, for a moment the daylight fell upon the face of the one whom Judson had questioned. As Judson waited to receive an answer, he saw the most terrible expression that he had ever seen. Horror, fright and anguish were stamped on his face, as though the man had seen a vision even worse than the daily life of the prison. Then Judson knew what it meant without an answer. It was three o'clock in the afternoon, — the hour of death.

"Is it my turn next?" Each poor fellow asked himself this question in terror as the prison grew still and the door was opened

every afternoon. But at nightfall when the keeper came, and running a long bamboo pole between their legs so as to thread the fetter chains, hauled their feet up with a block so that they rested all night on the back of their necks, they almost wished that the afternoon whose sun had just set had seen them vanished through the wicket door.

Such was the thought of Adoniram Judson, until the picture of his wife came to his mind. For her he would live and endure, for her he would be strong. And so, even after the terrible night, he was able to crawl and drag himself to the door in the morning, when his wife came to bring him a little food.

As he ate his breakfast, this brave little woman began to tell him what she was doing with the authorities in his behalf, when a coarse soldier drove her away, threatening to haul her out of the prison yard if she did not go. There was little relish to the rest of the meal for the heart-sick man.

But while Mrs. Judson was not able to tell her husband all that was going on, she was busy. She visited governors and officers. She urged the sister of the queen to influence the queen, and even presented a petition to Bandoola, the great general, who happened to be the king's guest, and who promised her that when he had retaken Rangoon and ex-

pelled the English he would return and release all the prisoners.

Bandoola could do little. Yet after a few months, Mrs. Judson was permitted to make her husband a little bamboo room outside in the prison enclosure. Then she was taken sick and could not come for many weeks. When she did come again she brought with her their little child, Maria, who was then two months old. But the little room which she had made was all in ruins, the mat and pillow stolen by the jailers, and her husband had been thrown into the inner prison again.

Immediately she started to see the governor. She thought that Mr. Judson had been executed. In this she was mistaken. He was not dead, but he was in terrible agony. With tears and entreaties she persuaded the governor not to execute her husband, and secured permission to go to the door of the inner prison and take him food.

Those were terrible days. Gradually things grew worse. Bandoola died, and all hope of help from that quarter ceased. A rebellion was rising among the restless people of Ava. Mr. Judson came down with the fever. One day the governor sent for Mrs. Judson, and while he detained her at the palace, he had all the white prisoners carried away to Amarapoora. The next day she started by boat

and cart for Amarapoora, only to find on arriving there that the prisoners had been sent on farther.

At Oung-pen-la Mrs. Judson found her husband, and learned how, under the midday sun, they had half-driven, half-dragged him over the eight miles of burning sand and gravel. She found the prison at Oung-pen-la even worse than the one at Ava. Both body and soul grew faint. Then the baby caught the smallpox, and the brave little woman was almost distracted.

Finally she got an old Burmese cart, the wheels of which were thick planks with a hole in the middle, through which a pole was thrust to support the body of the cart, and, in mud that almost buried the oxen, drove back to Ava for medicine. For two long months after her return she lay half-conscious on a woven mat.

One morning Mr. Judson was hurried off to Maloun, where the Burmese army was in camp. There on the banks of the Irawadi they built him a bamboo hovel where he lived and acted as translator and interpreter. For a few weeks their troubles were diminished, but Mrs. Judson's health began to decline and finally she was seized with the spotted fever. While she lay helpless his tormentors again threw her husband into the prison at

Ava. It was here, while Mrs. Judson was recovering, that the faithful Moung Ing found him.

They had found him in time, for only two days later the town of Ava was all astir with excitement and alarm. Order after order was dispatched from the palace. The English were approaching the capital and in a day or two would be at its gates. What should be done? They had abused the white people within their realm, and now a white army was at their gates demanding that an account be rendered. They would send the prisoners as ambassadors!

The officers of the court remembered how they had extorted money from the woman whose husband they had thrust into prison. They thought of the indignities which they had shown to Mr. Judson. The royal secretary grew pale as it all came to his mind. He had permitted the jailer to steal part of the food brought to the starving man in fetters. He had even robbed the white woman of her parasol and turned her out in the glaring sun.

And now their prisoner, who had gone down the river with the others as a messenger to the English camp, was returning. Would he tell his deliverers of the terrible treatment that he had received at the hands of the Burmans?

The governor summoned the secretary to the room where the ambassadors were to be received. The governor expected that the setting sun would throw its rays across his grave.

He thought that he could hear the English drummers rolling out the call to arms. His fevered head grew heavy with the roar of cannon and the rattling of muskets. Would they behead him, or slowly torture him as he had tortured his prisoners?

There was a knock at the door. The shadow of the sun-dial lay at three. He braced himself for his last official duty.

"Enter!"

The door was thrown back and the ambassadors entered. A guard of the queen's soldiers was with them. With sinking heart the governor advanced toward his guests and bowed them to their seats. At least it would soon be over.

Late that night, when the moon had risen over the palace dome, eight golden boats floated out on the water of the Irawadi. Down, down they floated through the cool, still night. The boats stirred the water into little ripples as they floated along. Three of the boats held the gold and silver vessels of the palace melted for tribute. The other boats carried several men and a pale white woman.

All night they floated, and just as the day began to break the woman turned to the man at her side and whispered something to him. Mr. Judson did not answer his wife, but drawing her close to him they knelt in the little boat and gave thanks to God. For the rising sun was shining on the flag of a British steamboat. Yandabo was reached, — and freedom.

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